

**FRAMING FEMININITY: HOW CATHOLIC WOMEN USE BLOGGING
TO NAVIGATE A “SECULAR” DISCOURSE ON FEMINISM THROUGH
A RELIGIOUS LENS**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

MORGAN E. KNOBLOCH

Submitted to the Undergraduate Research Scholars program at
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as an

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

Approved by Research Advisor:

Dr. Heidi A. Campbell

May 2019

Major: Communication

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	1
Literature Review	1
Thesis Statement	2
Theoretical Framework	2
Project Description	2
DEDICATION	4
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	5
INTRODUCTION	6
CHAPTERS	
I. THE MODERN VIEW OF WOMEN, FEMINISM, AND CATHOLICISM	7
Feminism in Contemporary Culture	7
The Catholic Church and Feminism	11
Feminist Discourse in Blogging and Digital Culture	14
Summary	18
II. METHODOLOGY	20
Blog Profiles	21
Summary	23
III. HOW BLOG DISCOURSE FRAMES CATHOLIC FEMINISM	25
The Value of Voice	25
Equality Through Complementary Roles	28
Maternity	30
The Catholic Feminist Take on the Abortion Debate	33
Summary	36
CONCLUSION	38
WORKS CITED	40

ABSTRACT

Framing Femininity: How Catholic Women Use Blogging to Navigate a “Secular” Discourse on Feminism Through a Religious Lens

Morgan E. Knobloch
Department of Communication
Texas A&M University

Research Advisor: Dr. Heidi A. Campbell
Department of Communication
Texas A&M University

Literature Review

Digital media use, especially that of blogs, provides ordinary people with a forum to express their unique views on social issues within the public sphere (Jenkins 2016). Through blogging, women create and consume representations of femininity that shape their perceptions of how to navigate their identity within the culture in which they reside (Keller 2015; Lövheim 2013; Teusner 2010). In reference to religion, Catholic women’s blogs establish a collective narrative that emerges from their online communities (Whitehead 2014), who together discuss topics ranging from motherhood to careers to fashion and modesty (Lövheim 2012, 2013). As bloggers operate according to their own terms, they discuss secular issues through a religious lens (Cheong 2008; Whitehead 2013). As female Catholic bloggers interpret cultural movements in light of their faith, their discussions of feminism re-frame the push for women’s equality in a way that allows them to participate in both their culture and their religion (Gervais 2012). This study will explore the ways in which women integrate feminism with the Catholic faith through their digital media use.

Thesis Statement

Catholic women navigate their religious identity within the “secular” movement of feminism by using blogs to derive themes that emphasize the value of the feminine voice, female equality, and an inherent maternal nature by referencing scripture, papal language, and the Virgin Mary and other saints to create a new feminist movement that adds religion to the concept of intersectionality.

Theoretical Framework

In keeping with critical discourse analysis, which argues that discourse and language shape and reflect one’s identity, this study identifies how Catholic bloggers’ conversations frame their religious identity and feminist outlook through analyzing the themes that emerge from discussions about feminism from select Catholic women’s blogs.

Project Description

This study investigates how religious discourse about feminism influences individuals’ identities by focusing on the question: In what ways do female Catholic bloggers’ discussions about feminism shape women’s identities? A sample of twenty-five blog posts was collected from six specific blogs, written by Catholic women who focus their online discussions on issues of womanhood and religious freedom. Blogs were identified using a “snowball sampling” method, which began with a Google search using the term “Catholic feminism.” Posts that addressed feminism or women’s identity and Catholic themes were selected for analysis. Each post was analyzed and coded according to common themes defined by the rhetoric used in multiple posts that answered the initial research question while suggesting the integration of religious and secular concepts regarding what it means to be a woman. The data gathered from these selected posts provides insight to the perceived tension between Catholic and feminist

understandings of womanhood to show how female bloggers evaluate and integrate these seemingly disparate perspectives to present them to others as complementary in their religious identities online.

DEDICATION

To all the women in my life who have taught me how to live out the truth of my identity,
and to my dad, for always encouraging me to chase after my dreams.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe my sincere gratitude to many who have made the completion of this project possible. Thank you to Dr. Heidi Campbell for advising me throughout this research and helping me mold my abstract thoughts into concrete sentences. Thank you to all the wonderful people at the Glasscock Center and to Susanne and Melbern Glasscock for supporting and establishing the Glasscock Summer Scholars Program, which allowed me to explore my interests through this thesis. Thank you to my fellow Summer Scholars for sharing in this journey with me, and thank you to Dr. Laura Mandell, who led us in all of our writing workshops over the summer. Thank you to the College of Liberal Arts for broadening my perspective and teaching me to think critically about our culture. Thank you to my roommates, who read my rough drafts and encouraged me throughout this process. Last but not least, thank you to my family, who has supported me not only in this endeavor, but also every other opportunity in my life.

INTRODUCTION

Emerging forms of new media, such as blogs, offer ordinary people a platform to express their unique views on social issues within the public sphere. Once these views circulate on the Internet, other people begin adopting them as their own, and these ideas that originally belonged to a single person become the framework that shapes how the public understands the world. Blogs make the phenomenon of regular people establishing themselves as “instant experts” on subjects in which they may not be especially experienced possible (Jenkins 2016). As blogs offer women this opportunity to share their ideas and opinions concerning matters of life and religion, they create a collective narrative that defines how “ideal femininity” should be expressed. While feminism may seem to contradict religions, specifically Catholicism, as defined by secular culture, women with religious beliefs are re-framing the push for women’s equality in a way that allows them to participate in both the culture in which they live and their religion. Studying how women interpret feminist movements in relation to their Catholic beliefs will provide insight on how people negotiate their religious identity in relation to the broader culture in which they reside as well as to how new media creates a space for civil discourse as users offer their unique perspectives on how apparently conflicting ideas can complement each other to form a new point of view. This study will investigate how religious discourse about feminism influences individual’s identity by focusing on the question: In what ways do female Catholic bloggers’ discussions about feminism shape women’s identities? Through critical discourse analysis, this study identifies common themes that lay the foundation for the concept of “Catholic Feminism” as found within Catholic women’s blog post discussions.

CHAPTER I

THE MODERN VIEW OF WOMEN, FEMINISM, AND CATHOLICISM

To understand how the discourse concerning Catholic Feminism that emerges from blog posts exemplifies how new media use provides women with the means to navigate their religious identity in a secular context, the modern view of American women and the impact society and religion has on their identity must first be discussed. With the rise of intersectionality in the third wave of feminism, women now have an opening to interpret feminist and religious values in light of each other. Using this opening, bloggers can discuss the Catholic Church and feminism, which provides an example as to how feminist and digital discourse play out in blogging and digital culture. The following section will provide the context necessary for Catholic women to lay the foundation for “Catholic Feminism” by first discussing the modern view of women according to “secular” feminism and then describing how the role of women is depicted within Catholic theology. Finally, this section will address the ways in which blogging establishes an online forum for women to discuss their religious identity within contemporary culture. These ideas converge through new media use, which will be analyzed in the final section.

Feminism in Contemporary Culture

The feminist movement in the United States has sought to address the issues of inequality faced by women in society through activism, raising awareness for the value of women and their role in the world. Previously, the feminist narrative focused on the experiences of white middle class women, who appeared stuck in domestic duties and kept inside the home (Crawford 2018). Today, however, intersectionality suggests that people, women in particular, span multiple minorities, giving them complex identities which encompass issues from race and gender to class

and even religion (Crawford 2018). Over the course of the women's movement, progress toward increasing respect in regard to women's positions in society has been made through occupations they hold and careers they choose to pursue (DiDonato 2013). As feminists continue to work toward cultivating a culture that moves past gender stereotypes (Sherman 2014), they also broaden the ideology behind the qualities that constitute a feminist by emphasizing the value of intersectionality. Understanding intersectional feminism is key to understanding the contemporary women's movement, which sparked the online discourse that continues to create the concept of Catholic Feminism. To become a push for inclusivity, feminism has begun to recognize that no single experience ties all women together; rather, feminists have started to emphasize personal experiences to paint a diverse mosaic of what it means to be a woman. This desire for inclusivity opened the door for women, especially Catholic women in this case, to interpret feminism according to their own experiences and ideals.

In the current third wave, feminism has moved toward becoming an inclusive movement by embracing the stories of women whose backgrounds tie them to other minorities, whether those groups concern ethnicity, sexual orientation, or class. In an essay concerning the new directions of the third wave of feminism, R. C. Snyder (2008) states "third-wave feminism rejects grand narratives for a feminism that operates as a hermeneutics of critique within a wide array of discursive locations, and replaces attempts at unity with a dynamic and welcoming politics of coalition" (p. 176). Third-wave feminism does away with "requirements" to being a feminist. On a positive note, it could be seen as embracing all women and calling for them to bring their own individuality into the movement. On the other hand, it could be more divisive as women take to different ideas about how to proclaim their femininity and open up arguments as to women's role and place in society. Whether this rejection of unity is championed or dismayed,

the third wave of feminism presents women with a freedom to avow their rights in the ways that align to their culture and beliefs. “They simply seek to rid feminist practice of its perceived ideological rigidity” (Snyder 2008, p. 176). In loosening this rigidity, the feminist agenda opens itself to interpretation. Though a collective movement may seem impossible with such openness, this actually gives women the opportunity to find the unique causes that tie them together across the many factions of feminism. This is where Catholic women seek to find commonalities that unite them with other women despite religious differences. In conflating Catholic theology with feminist ideals, Catholic bloggers show that religion should also be considered a factor within intersectionality.

As the prerequisites for feminism become relative to one’s personal beliefs, an individual must choose for herself what lies behind the truth of femininity, opening the door for women to re-interpret feminism according to their religious beliefs, as can be seen through the blogs of Catholic women. Unique narratives emerge from individual women to emphasize the importance of one’s “personal story” and, in turn, reject the “grand narrative” previously used to describe the experiences of all women (Snyder 2008, p. 183). In showcasing individual struggles and drawing attention to social justice for marginalized groups, the third wave has begun to inch away from the concern of creating a huge political movement by declaring simple, everyday acts as feminism to demonstrate that women’s equality is a way of life rather than a set of laws. In the third wave, women have reclaimed “girly” desires and stereotypes to assert their identities. Jessica Bain (2016) shows how women have begun to reclaim the hobby of sewing. Though previously seen as a domestic activity restrictive to women, sewing can be used as a feminist action in creating clothes for self-expression and even to combat fast-fashion. In a similar way,

Catholic women are re-claiming their religious beliefs to show that the Catholic Church supports women's equality.

Because some religious communities have been framed as oppressive to women, whether through restricting their involvement to motherhood or by acts of benevolent sexism, which addresses the special treatment of women because of their sex (Gervais, S. J. 2012), religion has often been discredited as a space that does not promote the equality of women. However, this project argues that religious groups can become spaces where feminist values and goals are also engaged. Intersectionality appears as an invitation to religious women to join in the movement to promote the value of women in contemporary culture. Catholic women use the freedom granted to the feminist movement today to interpret it according to their own beliefs and show how it actually agrees with the teachings of the Church.

Despite differences in personal beliefs, all women can promote the good of women, especially within the realm of intersectionality. Feminism as a movement emphasizes a number of core values including freedom, equality, justice, and self-actualization for women (Crawford 2018). As so much individuality emerges, many different beliefs about how to achieve those goals do as well (Snyder 2008). As politics collide with religion, people seek to articulate their values in ways that present opportunities for unity, as can be seen through the topics Catholic women choose to tackle on their blogs. As arguments are framed as issues of basic human rights instead of issues of religion, new doors open to allow people who don't consider themselves religious to connect with those who do. On blogs specifically, women begin to bridge the gaps of opinions and contradictions to unite in support of all women. New pro-life ideologies, for example, develop feminist agendas as they re-frame arguments using rhetoric that focuses on what is in the best interest of women, which will be addressed later in the results of this study.

As women center their attention on the issues that unite them, they embrace diversity and move toward living in peace despite different values. Catholic women especially exemplify this in their online communities by emphasizing the feminist arguments that actually align with Catholic teachings. This study will look at how Catholic women promote feminism through emphasizing the value of women's voices, equality, and maternal nature on their blogs, using references to scripture, papal language, and the Virgin Mary and other saints to demonstrate how a woman can live as a Catholic and a feminist when it may seem impossible upon first impression.

The Catholic Church and Feminism

The articulation of Catholic feminism produced by women through their blogs emerges from modern Catholic theology, especially through papal letters. The roots of Catholic Feminism are grounded within the Catholic Church's teachings on women's identity. After Vatican II, Pope St. John Paul II wrote extensively on what it means to be a woman. In his letter concerning the dignity and vocation of women written in 1988, Pope John Paul II stated that humanity is undergoing a change in which society is beginning to recognize the importance of the role of women. He writes "In our times the question of 'women's rights' has taken on new significance in the broad context of the rights of the human person. *The biblical and evangelical message* sheds light on this cause, which is the object of much attention today, *by safeguarding the truth about the 'unity' of the 'two'*, that is to say the truth about that dignity and vocation that result from the specific diversity and personal originality of man and woman" (John Paul II 1988). According to Catholic teaching, male and female are equal as both are created in the "image and likeness of God," yet they each possess different qualities so that when united, man and woman reflect the parenthood, or complete image, of God. Modern Catholic teachings

emphasize the complementary nature of men and women while teaching that a woman's role holds equal importance to that of a man's.

In speaking of men and women as parents, Pope John Paul II asserts that being a parent comes to light most fully in the woman's role as a mother, laying the groundwork for bloggers to discuss maternity as an inherent quality of all women. By developing a child in her womb, the mother shares in creativity with God by bringing a new life into existence. He states, "It is therefore necessary that *the man* be fully aware that in their shared parenthood he owes *a special debt to the woman*. No program of 'equal rights' between women and men is valid unless it takes this fact fully into account" (John Paul II 1988). This would align with the ideology behind cultural feminism, which emphasizes the different qualities of men and women while advocating for increased respect for women's contributions to society (Crawford 2018). As Catholic bloggers make maternity a central theme of their perspective on feminism, they further align with cultural feminists who are mothers themselves (Liss 2012). Further addressing women who are married, Pope John Paul II discusses their role as wives. He states that there is a mutual subjection of both the man and the woman in marriage out of reverence for Christ. The Church recognizes, however, that not all women are called to marriage, further aligning with feminist ideals in suggesting that marriage does not ultimately define a woman. For women who are not physically mothers, the Church teaches that they still express their maternal nature through their nurturing care for the persons they encounter. As Catholic women later describe on their blogs, maternity does not have to be demonstrated in the physical sense of the word. Every woman, whether they have physically borne children or not, embodies a motherly heart through compassion and care for other people, making women's "contributions to society" include advancements in human rights and social justice in addition to raising children.

Pope John Paul II recognizes that in the Gospels, Jesus promoted the rights of women, providing the scriptural base bloggers need to advocate feminist themes through their blogs. Jesus' behavior toward women differed from other men at that time (John Paul II 1988). Jesus would not only speak to women, but he would also interact with those whom society saw as great sinners. In referencing Jesus' biblical examples, it can be argued that the Catholic Church esteems women with equal dignity to men according to Pope St. John Paul II's writings, meaning that women garner the same respect and value in society as their male counterparts while remaining uniquely their own. This is seen in descriptions of how through femininity, women bear God's image to the world in qualities, such as maternity, inherent to their identity as a woman.

The Catholic discourse around feminist issues does not discount the efforts of liberal feminism and "womanism" to advocate for women to have full equality though the law with men and stand up for those marginalized in society (Crawford 2018). Pope St. John Paul II, in fact, advocates the importance of granting women equality concerning personal rights in his 1995 *Letter to Women* by saying women should receive "everything due to citizens of a democratic State" (John Paul II 1995). Noting the contributions of women to the advancement of the "social and ethical dimension" of society, Pope John Paul II argues that women have contributed to the growth of humanity just as much as men, only in a different aspect which reflects the unique qualities of femininity. As supported by these papal writings, the Catholic Church teaches that women deserve the same respect as their male counterparts for the progress of society and their advocacy for human rights.

In another letter to Gertrude Mongella, the Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference on Women of the United Nations, Pope St. John Paul II again asserts that

guaranteeing women legal rights leads to acknowledging their dignity and respecting their equal footing with men. He notes “equality of dignity does not mean ‘sameness with men,’” as advocating for such would only rob the world of the value of woman, but that “in the Church’s outlook women and men have been called by the Creator to live in profound communion with one another, with reciprocal knowledge and giving of self, acting together for the common good with the complementary characteristics of that which is feminine and masculine” (John Paul II 1995). Through Pope St. John Paul II’s letters, Catholic teachings give women a valuable role in guarding the rights of all humanity and advocating for those in need. The Church sees women as holding a dignity equal to men and esteems their contributions to the progress of society.

Through demonstrating the Catholic Church’s esteem for women’s position in society, references to papal language and scripture establish the foundation for Catholic women to articulate the concept of Catholic Feminism and share it throughout the communities they foster through blogging. The Catholic articulation of feminism aligns most closely with the concept of cultural feminism by emphasizing the complementary nature of men and women’s roles in society and the value of women’s inherent maternal demeanor. In advocating for the equal dignity of women, Catholic teachings also promote the need for women’s rights to be protected through legislation, thus intersecting with the objectives of feminists who push for the government to establish laws that recognize men and women’s full equality by preventing sex-based discrimination. To further demonstrate how the intersectional aspect of feminism and Catholic views of feminine dignity complement each other, women turn to the digital forum provided through blogs.

Feminist Discourse in Blogging and Digital Culture

Bloggging and digital culture provide the forum necessary for feminist beliefs to circulate among online communities and unite women across their diverse backgrounds. Scholars have found that new media use through blogs provides women with the space to articulate their beliefs and come together through online social networking (Lovheim 2012, 2013). As the personal narratives from blogs gain a foothold in the political sphere, blogs, as a place to tell stories, show the individuality of these narratives and highlight their importance, which is vital to the current wave of feminism. Ordinary people use blogs as a platform to express their unique views on social issues within the public sphere. Once these views circulate on the Internet, other people begin adopting them as their own, and these ideas that originally belonged to a single person become the framework that shapes how the public understands the world. Blogs have helped create a phenomenon where regular people can establish themselves as “instant experts” online, resulting in an abundance of women who can share and build upon their emerging ideas with other women all over the world (Jenkins 2016).

Tavi Gevinson, for example, used her fashion blog to discuss feminism with teenagers. Jessalynn Keller (2015) writes that Gevinson’s self-brand and articulation of “girl power” illustrate a “resurgence of feminism within contemporary popular culture” (p. 274) that defines her own identity while simultaneously inviting other girls to use it as a framework to “understand their own struggles as part of a lengthy history of feminist activism” (p. 279). Gevinson’s blog exemplifies how online forums are used to create social movements that provide the framework as to how women should conduct themselves in their everyday lives. Representations of women in the media shape society’s perception of and expectations for the female identity. Mia Lövheim (2013) describes gender as a key aspect in ordering the world and making sense of social

situations for the narrative it creates in defining certain ways of behaving as feminine or masculine. Through their design and imagery, blogs can also establish symbols that represent gender narratives (Teusner 2010). In this way, the complete composition of blogs begins to influence feminine identity.

As the ideas women advocate through their blogs influence their readers, the motivation behind the creation and circulation of those ideas is also present in the author's writings. Jessica Bain (2016) looks to the feminist agendas behind sewing blogs as an example of this. In analyzing how women are using home-dressmaking as an intentional feminist act, Bain (2016) begins to discover the ways in which women use sewing, a hobby that appears to contradict gender equality on the surface, to actually promote the goals of feminism. "Blog posts specifically are deemed here to be a valuable resource on digital dressmakers' motivations and politics, since blogs function as a means of sharing craft and fostering community, but also that blog content typically continues to function in a diary-fashion, providing the space for bloggers to articulate feelings and motives" (p. 60). Blogs are personal ways for women to share their ideas, advocate for social justice, and strengthen their communities. Bain found blogs build communities that foster ideas among peers and form support networks while showing that activities seen as oppressive simply because they were restricted to or forced upon women can champion the causes of feminism while honoring and respecting women for their inherent dignity. Similarly, Catholic women have taken to blogging to show that their religious beliefs do, in fact, promote their dignity and standing within society to a culture that may believe otherwise.

As women take to blogging to share their ideas and opinions concerning matters of life and religion, they create a collective narrative that defines how "ideal femininity" should be expressed. Bloggers establish authentic relationships with their readers by sharing intimate

details of their lives online, contributing to growing emphasis on personal experiences among the movement for women's equality. Deborah Whitehead (2014) revealed the depth of these online relationships between women as she studied how fraud destroys bloggers' credibility. Women's blogs are expected to be authentic as they are essentially open diaries of their lives where women share their testimonies of navigating the world as a female, ranging from stories concerning motherhood and careers to fashion and modesty (Lövheim 2012, 2013).

Religious female bloggers often discuss secular topics while framing them in light of their faith. Pauline Cheong (2008) writes that "religious bloggers [operate] outside the realm of the conventional nuclear church as they connect and link to mainstream news sites, other nonreligious blogs, and online collaborative knowledge networks" (p. 128). Because bloggers and their followers comprise a tight-knit community, posts and comments between members create religious discourse that merges secular ideas with religious beliefs. Catholic Feminism emerged from these religious discussions of secular concepts. Whitehead (2013) offers an example of interpreting the secular through a religious lens from the conclusions of her study on the reactions of Christian "mommy bloggers" to the *Fifty Shades of Grey* book series. These blogs allowed "desire, sexuality, gender, culture, and religion to collide in a rich discussion" (p. 927) that provoked thought on how secular ideas can be consumed in tandem with religious virtue. In a similar way, Catholic women take to their blogs to discuss social, cultural, and political issues. The ideas that surface from these conversations frame how women perceive their religious identities while participating in secular society.

As female Catholic bloggers articulate their view of the world in light of their faith, it is only natural that they interpret the concept of feminism. While feminism may seem to contradict religions, specifically Catholicism, as defined by secular culture, women with religious beliefs

are re-framing the push for women's equality in a way that allows them to participate in both the culture in which they reside and the religion in which they believe. In her 2012 study on Catholic religious Sisters in Canada, Christine Gervais reveals two sides of feminism within Catholicism. The first category describes women who hold their faith above their feminist ideals, and the other identifies some Catholic women who place their feminist beliefs at the heart of their spirituality and, therefore, above their religion (Gervais 2012). Though this provides a solid starting point for exploring the identity that blogs allow women to create through the conflation of Catholic beliefs with feminist values, a simple binary cannot provide a complete description. Through the diverse online world of blogging, Catholic women depict and define a feminism that gives them a place both in their faith and in their contemporary culture.

Summary

Understanding the context of feminism in contemporary culture demonstrates how the women's movement has opened itself to include religion. By embracing intersectionality through highlighting the value of individual experiences for women, feminism has made strides toward inclusivity for women across a diverse array of backgrounds. In perceiving this opening, Catholic women have taken to blogging to discuss feminist ideology in light of their faith, building upon the themes that emerge of papal writings and scripture concerning the treatment of women and their role in society. Through the conversations that circulate on their blogs, Catholic women demonstrate that religion should be considered an important factor encompassed by intersectionality, thus giving women who may have previously felt excluded by feminism because of their faith a role in the movement for women's equality. In the next chapter, the methodology behind this study will be explained before exploring how women integrate feminism with the Catholic faith through an analysis of their blog discussions, which refer to

scripture, papal language, and the Virgin Mary and other saints to build themes focused on the value of women's voice, their equality, and inherent maternal nature.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this study, a sample of posts that address the lives of women through a discourse framed by Catholic teachings were collected from six specific blogs – *The Catholic Woman*, *FemCatholic*, *The Young Catholic Woman*, *Blessed Is She Blog*, *Life Teen Blog*, and *FOCUS Blog*. These blogs were identified using a Google search with the terms “Catholic feminism,” and subsequent blogs were selected through a “snowball” sampling method, meaning the initial blogs that came from the top results of the Google search provided links to blogs concentrated on similar topics. To determine how widely circulated these blogs were among users and assess the scope of their readership, their social media platforms were reviewed to judge the amount of likes, shares, and interaction that their average post would receive. Once it was determined that these blogs did have an established audience, they were selected for this study. Each blog contains posts from multiple authors, showcasing a broader range of views from multiple women who are practicing Catholics. The posts that comprised the blog sample were identified for containing the word “feminism” or a closely related term such as “women’s identity” in conjunction with rhetoric that contained Catholic influences through references to papal language, scripture, or the Church in general. Once these posts were collected, they were analyzed using critical discourse analysis to determine the common themes of the value of women’s voice, equality, and maternity that were articulated across the narrative created by overarching discourse from these blog entries. Before exploring the depth of these themes, the following section will detail each blog used for this study.

Blog Profiles

The first blog identified for this study, *The Catholic Woman*, takes an intersectional approach to Catholic womanhood. The entries on *The Catholic Woman* appear as letters, typically addressed “Dear Sisters,” that tell the personal stories of women as they live out their faith in society. Their mission statement reads, “The Catholic Woman is a multimedia platform with the mission to illustrate the many faces and vocations of women in the Church today to promote an awareness of the personhood of Catholic women to show that there is a place for millennial Catholic women of all walks of life in the Catholic Church.” With their focus on illustrating the diversity of women within the Catholic Church, this blog lends itself toward creating a narrative that allows women to live out their faith in the broader culture in which they reside. *The Catholic Woman* attempts to publish content that personalizes the Catholic faith while promoting studying the Church’s teachings and solidarity among women with diverse backgrounds across their faith. For this study, posts from this blog that highlighted women’s experiences with feminism and their role within society and the Catholic Church were analyzed to define how women viewed the women’s movement in light of their religious beliefs.

The next blog, entitled *FemCatholic: For Women. For the Church.*, takes a direct approach in highlighting the common ground between Catholicism and feminism. Inspired by Pope St. John Paul II’s *Letter to Women* from 1995, this blog establishes itself as a platform to promote women with a focus on three pillars: education, encouragement, and empowerment. *FemCatholic* seeks to educate women about how the Catholic Church views their role as a female in society while encouraging women to address challenges in living out their identity. Finally, this blog seeks to empower women to embrace their faith and feminism as they reside in a secular society. Posts from this blog provided insight to the general definition of Catholic

Feminism while also contributing to the case study on how Catholic feminists navigate the issue of abortion found at the end of this chapter.

With a target audience of millennial Catholic women, *The Young Catholic Woman* addresses a wide range of topics, from marriage and careers to traveling and music, illustrating a holistic image of modern Catholic women. The blog refers to itself as a resource for women to grow in understanding who they are. It addresses five “elements” that should be cared for within a woman – her heart, soul, story, recovery, and everyday moments. In emphasizing these elements, *The Young Catholic Woman* encourages women to grow in their faith and feminine identity. While offering a less explicit stance on feminism, posts from this blog lend themselves toward creating the themes of women’s voice and maternity because they highlight the value of feminine experiences and growth within contemporary society.

The other three blogs analyzed for this study – *Blessed Is She Blog*, *FOCUS Blog*, and *Life Teen Blog* – are platforms utilized by larger ministries. The website *Blessed Is She* functions as a resource for Catholic women to establish an online community that shares in their faith, creating daily devotions via email, offering a shop for religious books, apparel, and the like, and managing a blog written by multiple women that shares advice, prayer resources, and even Spotify playlists. Within these posts, the *Blessed Is She* writers reflect on specific moments of their lives to create an overall mosaic that details the experience of modern Catholic women, from reflections on miscarriage and motherhood to beauty and poetry. Posts collected from the *Blessed Is She Blog* contributed to examples of bloggers’ views on Catholic femininity rather than directly addressing feminism, which surfaces more in the blogs managed by *FOCUS* and *Life Teen*.

FOCUS, an acronym for the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, is a ministry oriented toward college students to facilitate a deeper faith among them through establishing intentional friendships. As another online resource, FOCUS utilizes a blogging platform to allow students, employees, and other professionals to share their thoughts on aspects of life ranging from faith and prayer to culture and pro-life debates. After sifting through their wide array of topics, this study analyzed posts from FOCUS that specifically discussed women's roles in the church and their place in society. Discourse from the *FOCUS Blog* provided examples of how Catholic women begin to navigate feminism in relation to pro-life and pro-choice debates that make up one of the most divisive issues between the Catholic faith and feminist ideology.

The final blog used for this study comes from Life Teen, a ministry focused on guiding teenagers in the Catholic faith. Through their blogging platform, Life Teen circulates content written by a variety of authors, from young adults to religious sisters and priests, expanding on topics concerning Catholicism, life, and popular culture. The posts selected from Life Teen concentrate on the Catholic view of feminism, discussing the definition of the term and its relation to Catholic concepts. The data collected from these posts revealed the perspective of Catholic women transitioning into college as they advised younger girls who would soon be entering that sphere as well.

Summary

Overall, these six blogs weave the narrative that depicts the image of the “modern Catholic woman,” which demonstrates that feminine identity is not restricted to remaining docile and meek, but rather allows women to assert their dignity and champion their rights alongside feminists. Each blog represents a diverse range of perspectives in featuring multiple authors who each share a piece of their personal story in their account of Catholic femininity. After coding a

sample of posts from each blog according to the concepts that created a pattern across the discourse, three shared themes emerged to form the foundation for Catholic feminism. Through these themes, this study observes how women shape their identity by taking on a new religious perspective in regard to the women's movement that they define and expand upon through their blogging.

In the next section the three key themes are evaluated in further detail by first exploring how Catholic women articulate the value of the female voice, then by expanding upon the value of voice to promote full equality for women, and finally by discussing how bloggers see Catholic feminism exemplified through women's inherent maternal nature. Each of these themes develops through references to scripture (i.e. Biblical references) and papal language, particularly letters written to address the role and treatment of women in society. To exemplify how women should conduct themselves while promoting their equality in contemporary culture, bloggers draw from what they know of the lives of the Virgin Mary and other female saints in addition to their personal testimonies, thus laying the groundwork for understanding feminism through a religious lens.

CHAPTER III

HOW BLOG DISCOURSE FRAMES CATHOLIC FEMINISM

As Catholic women discuss feminism on their blogs, they share personal narratives that unite to outline a Catholic perspective of what it means to live as a female in modern society. Within this collection of personal narratives, bloggers draw upon their Catholic faith to make sense of their lived reality. The most common Catholic references that women use to build their arguments allude to scripture, papal language, and the Virgin Mary and other canonized saints. Relying upon personal testimonies aided by these sources, bloggers build three key themes that form the basis of “Catholic Feminism.” The first emphasizes the value of women’s voice through asserting that women deserve to hold positions of leadership and influence where they can express their ideas and opinions. The second takes the value of voice a step further by arguing that the dignity of women is completely equal to that of men. The final theme focuses on the quality of motherhood, which bloggers suggest is a characteristic inherent to all women whether or not they are physically mothers. Bloggers use these three themes to illustrate the image of the modern Catholic woman. Through the bloggers’ articulation of these ideas, the concept of “Catholic Feminism” begins to take root.

The Value of Voice

As Catholic women discuss feminism through blogging, the initial theme that surfaces regards their voice and emphasizes the value of their ideas and opinions by promoting respect for women’s roles within society. A woman’s “voice” speaks to her worth in addressing how her actions impact those around her. For women to achieve equality, they must be respected for their unique feminine role, which can be seen most clearly in social advancements toward human

rights as discussed by St. Pope John Paul II in his letters addressing how women have contributed to society throughout history. In a post for Life Teen, one blogger states that feminism “means amplifying the voices, experiences, and perspectives of all women” (LT Blogger 1), thus referencing the need for a diverse, intersectional view of femininity that gives women a place of respect within the Catholic Church and society. To express the value of voice, bloggers relate personal accounts of asserting their opinions and desiring to hold positions of leadership within the Church and society.

Another writer for *The Catholic Woman* relates her previous perception of how she thought the Catholic Church portrayed the role of women. She says, “And until I encountered the truth, I believed that the Catholic Church was a place of legalism and oppression, especially for women. As you can imagine, I was later delighted to learn that I was wrong” (CW Blogger 1). In commenting on her past ideas of Catholic femininity, she sheds light on stereotypes that shape the view of Catholic women in society. She later discusses the transformation of her ideas about Catholic femininity while introducing the ideology behind the “modern Catholic woman,” which agrees with intersectionality in affirming that women in the Church comprise a diverse array of backgrounds while each lives a story uniquely her own. Together, the individual stories of Catholic women converge to create a “new feminism,” a concept birthed in Pope St. John Paul II’s 1995 *Letter to Women*. This study will take a deeper look at “modern Catholic women” and “new feminism” in the following pages, but these ideas begin with women using their voice to garner respect for their contributions to society and encouraging other women to do so.

As women begin to assert their voice, they battle one of the stereotypes that may divide women of faith with secular feminists – the belief that practicing Catholic women are docile and passive, which would lead secular feminists to overlook any possibility for their goals to align

with those of practicing Catholic women. Because blogging is such a public sphere, however, it provides Catholic women with a platform to display their true identities and break through these stereotypes. The blogger for *The Catholic Woman* continues to say, “I struggled to reconcile my boldness with the quiet, docile picture of Mary that every song at church seemed to paint. I thought that was all the Church envisioned for women” (CW Blogger 1). She goes on to describe the outlet she saw for her boldness in the feminist movement, saying “Sometimes I would see this same passion and boldness in other women, too. I saw a fearlessness and a drive that mirrored my own and I thought – *these are my people*. They called themselves ‘feminists.’ They seemed to embrace my desire to be bold, to fight, to make the world a better place for women” (CW Blogger 1). Through her story, she tells of how she found her voice within the Catholic Church to unite the qualities that drew her to feminism with those of her faith.

To conclude her argument behind Catholic Feminism, the blogger cites Pope Francis’ address to consecrated men and women in which he promotes the value of feminine leadership in the Church, elevating women’s role and standing within their faith. “Our Pope is right: The Church needs our feminine genius. The good news is we never need permission to contribute our very selves to the faith. Women have a unique nature. We reveal God’s touch in a way that is different and complementary to men. We have a power that the world desperately needs.” This belief in the value of women to society frames the core argument that unites Catholic women with feminists. A woman’s voice encompasses her ability to contribute to the betterment of society through the natural qualities she embodies as a woman. In emphasizing the value of the feminine voice, Catholic women garner respect for the roles women embody, whether through motherhood, careers, or social justice. Building upon the foundation established by articulating

the value of women's voice, bloggers assert the need to recognize women and men as full equals in their complementary roles.

Equality Through Complementary Roles

Once women outline the value of the feminine voice, they use that voice to explain the equal dignity afforded to them through their role in the Church and society. Bloggers frame the Catholic feminist stance on equality not as a struggle for power but rather a campaign to promote the complementary nature of masculine and feminine roles as defined by their faith, which St. Pope John Paul II addressed in his explanation of how men and women together reflect the complete image of God (John Paul II 1988). LT Blogger 1 writes, "The Church firmly teaches the complementarity of man and woman, that God created men and women with equal dignity but not with sameness . . . [meaning] that our roles in the world are dependent on one another and illuminate each other's qualities — they are not in competition with each other but are meant to work alongside each other to make God known better." Defining the nature of men and women's roles in society according to their religious values provides the groundwork necessary to address their equality.

In her argument explaining how Catholicism and feminism do not contradict each other, but actually complement each other, CW Blogger 1 writes, "Feminism is the belief that men and women are equal. Here's the thing: Catholics believe that. And we need to CLAIM IT" (CW Blogger 1). Catholic women seek to embrace femininity in all of its forms, recognizing that each woman has a unique role to play, and while different than those of a man, they acknowledge that they should be upheld with the same dignity. On discovering how the Catholic Church actually empowers women, CW Blogger 1 tells her readers, "Today, let's be confident in knowing that the Church treasures women. And we each have a role to play. And women may have different

roles than men, but that does not make them less. Whatever your role is, I challenge you to play it well” (CW Blogger 1). Calling women to live with confidence in their femininity begins to cultivate a demeanor in women that requires others to treat them with respect, which aligns with the secular push for women to be valued as full equals to men.

Bloggers support the Catholic argument for women’s equality through their interpretations of scripture. A writer for *FemCatholic* reframes the scripture from Ephesians 5:22, which is often quoted for instructing wives to be subordinate to their husbands. FC Blogger 5 states, “The Lord did not create men and women to be in competition with one another over which sex is more powerful. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that man and woman were both made in the image and likeness of God, and both have equal dignity (paragraph 1700)” (FC Blogger 5) as she begins to explain her perspective on this particular Bible verse. Throughout her argument, she draws on examples of how Jesus interacts with his mother, the Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene, his most frequently referenced female follower in the Bible, to demonstrate that Jesus holds a special esteem for women that should translate into how men should treat women today. She notes that this scripture from Ephesians continues to say that husbands must love their wives, interpreting this to mean “wives are to subordinate themselves to their husbands. And husbands are to love their wives, which means they are to subordinate themselves to their wives’ good. So, when I submit to what my husband wants for our marriage, I am submitting to his submission for my own good. I’m okay with that” (FC Blogger 5). By interpreting scripture through a feminist lens, this blogger reframes the struggle for power that surfaces within the dynamic of marriage to demonstrate that though wives are called to be “subordinate,” they still retain their equality through a mutual respect with their spouse, thus strengthening the theme of equality between men and women.

Catholic women push for an equality that aligns with cultural feminists' view of feminine and masculine roles by centering their discussions on the need to respect feminine qualities as unique, empowering the position of women in the eyes of the Church and contemporary culture. As they explain the complementary nature of men and women, bloggers highlight the equal respect deserved by both men and women not for fulfilling the same roles, but for their inherent dignity as human persons, thus framing the image of the "modern Catholic woman" with equality through recognizing the value of femininity. Once they establish the foundations for the value of their voice and equal dignity, bloggers craft a narrative of what living as a Catholic feminist looks like through personal reflection aided by examples from the Virgin Mary and other female saints. In illustrating the "modern Catholic woman," Catholic bloggers narrow their focus to discuss the qualities that every woman encompasses in her femininity despite a diverse range of experiences and intersectional backgrounds, forming a united movement of Catholic Feminism.

Maternity

As bloggers campaign for unity while highlighting individuality, they emphasize maternity as a particular quality that lies in the inherent nature of all women, according to Catholicism. Bloggers explain maternity as the ability to care for and nurture the human person, not necessarily one's own child. While describing an instinctive maternal nature that underlies the essence of femininity, bloggers recognize that this quality does not evidence itself in the same way for every woman, thus remaining true to the diverse view of the lived feminine experience. Catholic women recognize that while a majority of women become physical mothers, many other women live out vocations as religious sisters, cannot bear children biologically, or simply have not reached that stage of life yet. Rather than restrict this natural

motherly instinct to women with children, bloggers define maternity as a manner of caring for others while tending to them with love and respect. They argue that women embody a unique ability to nurture those placed in their care with a regard to which their male counterparts are not naturally inclined.

To support their claims, women draw upon examples from the Virgin Mary and other female saints in addition to reflecting on papal writings, especially those of St. Pope John Paul II as he offered insight into specific ways in which women contribute to the Church. In reference to the value of motherhood represented through the Virgin Mary, CW Blogger 1 addresses her readers by saying, “The Church needs your strength . . . She needs your maternal heart like a Mama Bear going after her lost and suffering bear cubs.” To provide an example of the power women have in the Church, she further explains, “Mary reveals the power in obedience – power to persist in the face of catastrophic tragedy, doubt, and fear. I realized that the Devil had tried to hide this power behind my impressions of Mary as boring and meek because his greatest fear is it being unleashed in the world.” To “unleash” this power held by women, bloggers create the “new feminism” – Catholic Feminism – and associate maternity with putting the needs of others before one’s own to fight for their rights.

In a post for the *FOCUS Blog*, one author looks to the example of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta to illustrate the “power” women hold in the church, saying, “St. Teresa singlehandedly changed the world. She gave her entire being to Jesus Christ, and He used her unique feminine qualities to challenge the world and make it more humane through her. She — in her beauty, her humility, her boldness, her holiness — gave the world a bigger heart because she could see and nurture the other” (FOCUS Blogger 1). Though not a biological mother, Mother Teresa embodied the maternal qualities that Catholic women emphasize through their blogs by caring

for individuals who were marginalized by society. She cared for the needs of others before her own, giving up a life of comfort to serve those in need. This blogger concludes her argument by referencing Pope Francis' 2015 address to consecrated men and women to assert that when women are given the capacity to express their natural qualities, they strengthen the solutions to social problems faced by many today (FOCUS Blogger 1). Bloggers describe maternity as a trait encompassed by humility and strength. Women's maternal natures incline them toward seeking the good of others even before their own while having the strength to advocate for the rights of the poor and marginalized in the face of oppression. Through feminine qualities such as motherhood, women lead the Church and the world, according to Catholic bloggers, which establishes maternity as the third theme supporting the foundation of Catholic Feminism.

By sharing personal experiences supported by interpretations of scripture, papal language, and examples from the Virgin Mary and other female saints, Catholic bloggers begin to conflate their faith and feminism. Championing the value of women's voice and advocating for their equal dignity to be recognized within the Church and society bridges religious beliefs with secular ideology while the emphasis women place on maternity establishes a unifying quality among women. Using these themes, Catholic women demonstrate that religion must be considered as an aspect within the concept of intersectionality embraced by secular feminism today, thus allowing them to pave a path to finding common ground with non-religious feminists. Within this move toward unity, however, arguments over issues like abortion still divide Catholic feminists from the secular movement. The following case study investigates how Catholic women begin to navigate the pro-life versus pro-choice debate while still seeking to align themselves with feminism.

The Catholic Feminist Take on the Abortion Debate

Abortion carves a division between Catholic feminists and secular feminists, sparking debates in politics, society, and faith since it was legalized in 1973 with *Roe. v Wade*. The Catholic Church presents abortion as morally wrong and unacceptable, while feminism presents abortion as a right of women concerning their reproductive freedom and health care. In the following case study, the ways in which Catholic bloggers address this divide demonstrate how their response to feminism attempts to overcome conflicting issues by seeking commonalities while holding fast to their religious convictions. Through examining the dialogue focused on matters of abortion and female reproductive rights, this study shows that Catholic bloggers center their arguments around the promotion of the good of women while emphasizing broader goals that bridge the gap between pro-life and pro-choice debates. The next paragraphs present a summary of describing how Catholic women navigate civil discourse in areas that contradict their faith through presenting abortion as harmful to women; the following section does not seek to define the Catholic stance on abortion or pro-life debates. Rather, this section focuses on how Catholic women seek to find similarities as ways to work together instead of remaining divided over their differences through blogging.

To address pro-choice stances promoting abortion as an essential reproductive right for women, Catholic bloggers suggest that abortion actually poses a negative impact on women. In a post for FOCUS, one blogger presents an argument against abortion by framing pro-choice sentiments as apparently harmful to women, rather than a source of empowerment (FOCUS Blogger 2). This blogger cites researchers from the Elliot Institute for Social Science Research to support her statement that “women who have had abortions report nightmares, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, destructive behavior, addictions and “anniversary” symptoms that pop

up around the anniversary of their abortion or what would have been their baby's due date" (FOCUS Blogger 2). The author writes as an advocate for the right to human life, making abortion an issue that impacts more than just the woman, but also the conceived child and all others involved in the pregnancy. "The Church also cares about the mothers, the fathers, the clinic workers, and our society as a whole. Abortion, does not only end the life of a person, but impacts the entire society. It is like a pebble thrown into a pond, causing ripples that change the entire surface of the water" (FOCUS Blogger 2). Referring back to the theme of maternity, bloggers turn the focus of the debate on abortion to caring for every individual that would be impacted, which could be interpreted to mean that supporting abortion directly opposes the maternal aspect of Catholic Feminism. FOCUS Blogger 2 quotes St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta to emphasize the negative impacts of abortion on society, saying ". . . 'Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want. This is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion'" (FOCUS Blogger 2). Through blogging, Catholic women present abortion as an issue in opposition to the promotion of women's role in society, which Catholics have defined as advocating for the rights of those who cannot do so for themselves by caring and nurturing every individual.

In their response to abortion, Catholic bloggers even begin to assert that viewing abortion as empowering to women results in a misconception of what true femininity is. In an piece contributed by a Catholic priest for *The Young Catholic Woman*, one blogger argues that abortion attacks women's dignity by giving men power over women in freeing them from the responsibility of fatherhood (YC Blogger 1). Relying on papal language from St. Pope John Paul II's *Mulieris Dignitatem* and the example of the Virgin Mary, the author discusses the value of women's complementary roles to men while addressing their inherent maternal nature. In

reference to Mary, the blogger articulates that women are given a choice in accepting the life within them just as Mary was allowed to choose whether or not to say yes to bearing her son, Jesus. “In all her femininity, a woman bore the Redeemer. Through her free will Mary said yes to become the Mother of the Savior. Mary represents the entire human race in her acceptance of this divine grace” (YC Blogger 1). Because Mary accepted the life that was given to her, the blogger emphasizes that women should also accept the life God chooses to give to them, thus representing how the Catholic response to abortion looks to the Virgin Mary as an example of how a woman should live her role within the Church and society.

While Catholic feminist discourse presents a pro-life stance on abortion, bloggers do attempt to bridge political gaps and find commonality on bipartisan issues. In a post titled “Confronting the Stereotypes Associated with Catholic Womanhood,” another writer for *The Catholic Woman* discusses common misconceptions of women who are Catholic that interfere with opportunities for collaboration as she notes, “We Catholic women come from all sorts of backgrounds, political parties, and groups of interests . . . it is just our end goal that is the same. Yet the world does not always think so and we often have to face negative stereotypes” (CW Blogger 2). In her discussion, she reveals that Catholic women face challenges that are more similar to those of secular feminists than different. Confronting the misconceptions of how the position of women in the Catholic faith appears to society begins bridging the gap that divides them from feminists.

In one final look of how Catholic women navigate the arguments around abortion, this study found that even in the midst of heated political debates, bloggers emphasize common goals that bring Catholicism and feminism together, thus combatting stereotypes of women who practice the Catholic faith. One blogger for *FemCatholic* addresses the Supreme Court decisions

of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg to illustrate the possibility to collaborate across party lines. Through analyzing the decisions supported by Ginsburg, this blogger argues that Catholic women need not be afraid of admiring her though she represents a political stance in favor of abortion. Her analysis describes the ways Ginsburg's court decisions promoted the good of women outside of reproductive issues, thus suggesting that Catholic feminists seek ways to overcome the divide over tense political matters. She says, "As pro-life Catholic feminists, we ought to find common ground anywhere we can and work toward common goals with anyone who will collaborate with us" (FC Blogger 2). In highlighting the similarities between Catholicism and feminism, bloggers create a narrative of unity within Catholic Feminism. Through a Catholic lens, bloggers frame a new type of feminism that champions motherhood while still promoting equality for women. Catholic feminists hold fast to their religious beliefs, as seen through their pro-life discourse, yet they still seek to collaborate with women outside of the Catholic Church. Catholic Feminism demonstrates the introduction of religion through the value placed on intersectionality by broadening the women's movement to give Catholic women a place in advocating for women's equality in the contemporary culture in which they reside.

Summary

After identifying the six blogs that focused on topics related to Catholic women's position on the feminist movement, the critical discourse analysis of the collected sample of posts revealed the key themes used to found the concept of Catholic Feminism. In alluding to scripture, papal language, and the Virgin Mary and other female saints, Catholic bloggers discuss feminism in a positive light, giving women the opportunity to identify themselves as both Catholic and feminist. Emphasizing the value of women's voice leads Catholic bloggers to promote equality between men and women while recognizing that women offer the world a

perspective uniquely their own, especially through their inherent maternal nature. These founding themes behind Catholic feminism then allow women to navigate larger political issues such as abortion in ways that give them the opportunity to campaign for the promotion of women in society while remaining true to their religious beliefs. Overall, blogging serves as forum for Catholic women to frame their identity in light of their faith and feminist focus to navigate their position in the broader culture in which they live.

CONCLUSION

To answer the original research question, female Catholic bloggers' discussions about feminism shape women's identities through building upon examples from scripture, papal language, and references to the Virgin Mary and other saints. Using these specific methods, three key themes emerge from the collective narrative bloggers create in regard to defining Catholic Feminism. The first acknowledges that women have a voice and that their ideas and opinions offer significant contributions to society. Taking this first theme a step further, the second argues that women have an inherent dignity that is equal to that of their male counterparts. This gives women an equal standing with men in society, which ultimately aligns core feminist values with those of the Catholic Church. Finally, women use blogs to discuss the characteristics that they believe every woman naturally embodies while particularly emphasizing the nurturing qualities of motherhood, not only in physical motherhood, but also in showing the care of a mother to every human person. In this way, female Catholic bloggers build a bridge between religious ideals and "secular" feminist values, thus reframing the term "feminism" itself and asserting that religion must be considered an essential aspect of intersectionality.

Bloggers define feminism as a campaign for the dignity of all women to be fully recognized by society. Through emphasizing personal experiences and diversity among women, they align themselves with the intersectional view of feminism that emerged in the third wave. In narrating their individual stories, however, they draw from scripture, papal language, and the Virgin Mary and other saints to weave their faith into their understanding of feminism, giving women a way to advocate for their equality through their religious beliefs. Their explanations of Catholic Feminism emerge as an answer to St. Pope John Paul II's call for a "new feminism"

(John Paul II 1995) to promote women's rights according to their religious convictions. In their expansion upon the themes presented in these papal letters, bloggers establish a community of Catholic women who partake in this movement to recognize their equality. By building this online community, Catholic women's blog use echoes secular feminism's campaign for equality; however, in framing feminism through a Catholic lens, bloggers challenge aspects of feminism, such as the pro-choice stance on abortion, that do not agree with their religious beliefs. While these differences exist, Catholic women do seek to find common ground to collaborate with other women to promote the world's respect for women. As Catholic women navigate feminism through blogging, they establish a new faction of feminism that bridges the gap between the Church and secular society, creating a space to discuss bipartisan issues and work together in spite of dividing ideologies.

This study of the discourse from Catholic women's blogs offers insight as to how new media use allows individuals to navigate conflicting concepts. In this study, blogs served as a forum for bringing apparently contradictory ideas together to form an increasingly inclusive society over one separated by differences in belief and opinions. Expansions upon this research could begin to analyze how men perceive the concept of Catholic Feminism, whether protestant women attempt to find common ground with the women's movement, and even dive deeper into how the specific traits of communities like these strengthen inclusivity to promote collaboration between polarized groups in both politics and communities throughout society. With the emergence of new media use, research should continue to investigate the possibilities forums such as blogs create for individuals to navigate their identity in relation to cultural movements for a better understanding of how media can be used to cultivate peace and inclusivity.

WORKS CITED

- Bain, J. (2016). "Darn right Im a feminist...Sew what?" the politics of contemporary home dressmaking: Sewing, slow fashion and feminism. *Womens Studies International Forum*, 54, 57-66. doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2015.11.001
- Blessed Is She: The Blog. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://blessedisshe.net/the-blog/>
- Cheong, P. H., Halavais, A., & Kwon, K. (2008). The Chronicles of Me: Understanding Blogging as a Religious Practice. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 7(3), 107-131. doi:10.1080/15348420802223015
- Crawford, M. (2018). *Transformations: Women, gender, and psychology* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill education.
- CW Blogger 1. (2018, August 15). Catholic Feminism Is a Call, Not a Contradiction. Retrieved from <https://thecatholicwoman.co/letterstowomen/catholic-feminism-is-not-a-contradiction-its-a-call>
- CW Blogger 2. (2019, February 01). Confronting the Stereotypes Associated with Catholic Womanhood. Retrieved from <https://thecatholicwoman.co/letterstowomen/confronting-the-stereotypes-associated-with-catholic-womanhood?rq=stereotypes>
- Didonato, L., & Strough, J. (2013). Do College Students' Gender-typed Attitudes About Occupations Predict Their Real-World Decisions? *Sex Roles*, 68(9-10), 536-549. doi:10.1007/s11199-013-0275-2
- FC Blogger 2. (2019, January 19). Ruth Bader Ginsburg Response #2 - Charlene. Retrieved from <http://www.femcatholic.com/ruth-bader-ginsburg-response-2-charlene/>
- FC Blogger 5. (2018, March 29). Wives Should be Subordinate: What Paul Really Said. Retrieved from <http://www.femcatholic.com/wives-subordinate-paul-really-said/>
- FemCatholic: For Women. For the Church. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.femcatholic.com/>

FOCUS Blog. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://focusoncampus.org/blog>

FOCUS Blogger 1. (2018, September 26). The Great Call Women Have In The Church Today. Retrieved from <https://focusoncampus.org/content/the-great-call-women-have-in-the-church-today>

FOCUS Blogger 2. (2018, April 5). Abortion. Retrieved from <https://focusoncampus.org/content/abortion>

Gervais, C. L. (2012). Canadian Women Religious Negotiation of Feminism and Catholicism. *Sociology of Religion*, 73(4), 384-410. doi:10.1093/socrel/srs039

Gervais, S. J., & Hoffman, L. (2012). Just Think About It: Mindfulness, Sexism, and Prejudice Toward Feminists. *Sex Roles*, 68(5-6), 283-295. doi:10.1007/s11199-012-0241-4

Jenkins, H. (2016). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.

John Paul II. (1988). Apostolic Letter: Mulieris Dignitatem of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year. Retrieved December 17, 2018, from http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html

John Paul II. (1995). Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to Mrs. Gertrude Mongella Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference On Women of the United Nations. Retrieved December 17, 2018, from https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19950526_mongella-pechino.html

John Paul II. (1995). Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women. Retrieved December 17, 2018, from https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women.html

Keller, J. (2015). Girl powers last chance? Tavi Gevinson, feminism, and popular media culture. *Continuum*, 29(2), 274-285. doi:10.1080/10304312.2015.1022947

Life Teen Blog. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://lifeteen.com/blog/>

- Liss, M., & Erchull, M. J. (2012). Differences in Beliefs and Behaviors Between Feminist Actual and Anticipated Mothers. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 37(3), 381-391. doi:10.1177/0361684312468334
- Lövheim, M. (2012). A Voice of Their Own: Young Muslim Women, Blogs and Religion. In *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives* (pp. 129-145). Göteborgs universitet, Göteborg: Nordicom.
- Lövheim, M. (2013). *Media, religion and gender: Key issues and new challenges*. New York: Routledge.
- LT Blogger 1 (2019, March 08). Rethinking Feminism. Retrieved from <https://lifeteen.com/blog/rethinking-feminism/>
- Sherman, A. M., & Zurbriggen, E. L. (2014). "Boys Can Be Anything": Effect of Barbie Play on Girls' Career Cognitions. *Sex Roles*, 70(5-6), 195-208. doi:10.1007/s11199-014-0347-y
- Snyder, R. C. (2008). What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 34(1), 175-196. Retrieved November 20, 2018.
- Teusner, P. (2010). Imaging Religious Identity: Intertextual Play among Postmodern Christian Bloggers. *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 4(1). doi:10.11588/rel.2010.1.9387
- The Catholic Woman. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://thecatholicwoman.co/>
- TheYoungCatholicWoman. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.theyoungcatholicwoman.com/>
- Whitehead, D. (2013). When religious 'mommy bloggers' met 'mommy porn': Evangelical Christian and Mormon women's responses to Fifty Shades. *Sexualities*, 16(8), 915-931. doi:10.1177/1363460713508904
- Whitehead, D. (2014). The Evidence of Things Unseen: Authenticity and Fraud in the Christian Mommy Blogosphere. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 83(1), 120-150. doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfu083

YC Blogger 1. (2013, September 02). The Dignity of Women and Pope John Paul II. Retrieved from <http://www.theyoungcatholicwoman.com/archivescollection/2013/9/2/the-dignity-of-women-and-pope-john-paul-ii?rq=abortion>